



Shanghai Consulate News for Americans

Issue 32

September, 2010

Voting Made Easier: Electronic Delivery Options For Absentee Ballots & Upcoming State Primaries

This newsletter is published by the American Citizen Services (ACS) Unit, U.S. Consulate General in Shanghai. If there are any particular topics you are interested in, please contact ACS at: ShanghaiACS@state.gov.

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Special points of interest:

- * Voting Made Easier
- * Social Security Administration Q & A
- * Ask the Consul: Can I Request for a Thicker Passport?

This coming November, U.S. voters will elect 39 U.S. Senators and the entire House of Representatives. For overseas voters, the absentee voting process will be much easier, thanks in large part to a new law - the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act - that the U.S. Congress enacted last year.

To vote absentee, U.S. citizens living overseas must be registered to vote, and must request an absentee ballot. You can accomplish both tasks by completing a Federally-issued combination voter registration application and absentee ballot request form known as the Federal Post Card Application, or FPCA. This form, along with State-by-State instructions, is available on the Federal Voting Assistance Program website at www.fvap.gov, or from the U.S. Embassy and Consulates in China.

The new law gives U.S. citizens overseas the ability to request and receive absentee ballots electronically. Just send in a new FPCA with your email and/or complete fax number clearly written out. U.S. citizens who have changed their names, addresses, or email addresses, or who are infrequent voters, should also submit a new FPCA.

Be sure to follow your State's instructions

carefully when completing the form and sending it to local election officials in the United States. Both the FVAP website and the Overseas Vote Foundation website, <https://www.overseasvotefoundation.org/> have wizards that assist you in completing and addressing the FPCA.

If you do not receive your absentee ballot after sending in your FPCA within a reasonable time period, notify your local election officials by phone or email. You can also use the Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB) as a back-up emergency ballot. Check the www.FVAP.gov website.

Anyone who has not yet submitted a registration and ballot request (FPCA) for the 2010 calendar year should do so as soon as possible. The FPCA ballot application and instructions are available at www.fvap.gov/FPCA. Click on your State on the map and follow the instructions to register and request an absentee ballot. Some States allow submission of the FPCA by fax or email in addition to regular mail.

If you have any questions, please visit www.fvap.gov, shanghai.usconsulate.gov or send an email to VoteShanghai@state.gov.

Upcoming Holidays and Other Closures

The American Citizen Services Unit will be **CLOSED** on the following days:

October 1-5, Fri-Tues: Chinese National Day Holidays

October 11, Mon: Columbus Day

Embassy Beijing's ACS unit launches Facebook page

On July 20, 2010, Embassy Beijing's American Citizen Services (ACS) unit launched its first Facebook page. On this page, Americans traveling or residing in China can find information about the services ACS Beijing offers, hours of operation, location, and miscellaneous updates. If you have a Facebook account and would like to

receive regular updates, we invite you to visit this page.

This Facebook page is intended as a supplement to, NOT a replacement for, the Beijing ACS webpage (<http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/service.html>) and warden message system.

How to Join: From your Facebook page, search for "U.S. Embassy Beijing American Citizen Services" and click the "like" button at the top right of the page. This will allow you to access the page and receive updates.

Let us know if you think it would be helpful for the ACS unit here in Shanghai to create a Facebook page.

Security Situation - Travel Warnings and Alerts

Security reminder: It is prudent for you and your family to review your personal security profile and to be aware of your surroundings at all times.

Since our previous Newsletter, the U.S. Department of State has issued new Travel Warnings for the following countries:

<u>Mexico</u>	09/10/2010
<u>Korea, Democratic People's Republic of</u>	08/27/2010

Travel Warnings are issued to describe long-term, protracted conditions that make a country dangerous or unstable. A Travel Warning is also issued when the U.S. Government's ability to assist American citizens is constrained due to the closure of an embassy or consulate or because of a drawdown of its staff. This information is available at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html.

The U.S. Department of State also has issued new Travel Alerts:

Worldwide
India

09/09/2010
09/01/2010

Travel Alerts are issued to disseminate information about short-term conditions generally within a particular country or region that pose imminent risks to the security of U.S. citizens. Natural disasters, terrorist attacks, coups, anniversaries of terrorist events, election-related demonstrations or violence, and high-profile events such as international conferences or regional sports events are examples of conditions that might generate a Travel Alert. This information is available at



http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_1766.html.

The most up-to-date information regarding permitted and prohibited items on flights can be viewed online at <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>.

For additional information, please visit "Americans Traveling Abroad" on the U.S. Department of State website: http://travel.state.gov/visa/americans/americans_1252.html. Students traveling abroad may wish to visit the State Department site designed for them: <http://studentsabroad.state.gov/>.

To obtain up-to-date information on security conditions, please call 1-888-407-4747 (toll free in the United States), or +1-202-501-4444 if you are outside the United States.

You may also visit the Consular Affairs twitter page at <http://twitter.com/TravelGov>.

Pages, Passports: Don't Wait Until The Last Minute!

Don't wait until the last minute to add more pages to your passport or to apply for a new one.

The U.S. Consulate only adds pages to a passport two times. We will not add pages to a passport that already has two sets of added pages, or is in poor condition. It is our shared responsibility to protect the integrity of the passport and adding too many pages to a passport compromises its integrity. If you wait till there are no empty spaces

in your passport for visas or entry/exit stamps, you may be caught in a bind.

Pages can be added to a passport while you wait. If we reject your application for more pages, you will have to apply for a new passport. New passports are produced in the U.S. and normally arrive 10 business days after you submit your application. You may keep your old passport and still use it to travel while you wait for the new one. Note that if your old passport is completely full or

has less than 6-months validity, you may not be allowed to use it to exit China or to enter a third country.

To make an appointment to add more pages or to apply for a new passport, please visit: http://shanghai.usembassy-china.org.cn/appointment_system011309.html. The fee for adding pages is \$82, while the fee for applying for an adult passport renewal is \$110.

Social Security Number is Required for Passport Services

Failure to provide your Social Security Number (SSN) may result in significant processing delays and/or the denial of your application.

Section 6039E of the Internal Revenue Code (26 U.S.C. 6039E) requires you to provide your Social Security Number (SSN), if you have one, when you apply

for a U.S. passport or renewal of a U.S. passport. If you have not been issued a SSN, enter zeros in box #5 of the passport application form you are completing. Contact the Social Security Administration to request a Number, the Asia Pacific Rim of SSA International Operations Center in Manila, Tel: (632) 301-

2000, Fax: (632) 522-1514, Email:

FBU.Manila@ssa.gov

The U.S. Department of State must provide your SSN and foreign residence information to the Department of Treasury. If you fail to provide the information, you are subject to a \$500 penalty enforced by the IRS.

Autumn Hints for Easier Passport Services

- **Check your passport's expiration date.** Some countries in the region including China, the Philippines, and **Indonesia require that a passport's expiration date be at least six months in the future for visa issuance or visa-free entry (i.e., you will not be admitted if the passport has less than six months validity left).** For further details about visa and entry and exit requirements of countries in the region please go to the travel.state.gov website or check with the airline or your travel agent.

- **Review your children's passports.** Check the expiration date of their

passport – remember that passports for children under 16 are only valid for 5 years.

- **Make an appointment early for passport services.** All non-emergency consular services require an appointment. You can make an appointment online through our website: http://shanghai.usembassy-china.org.cn/appointment_system011309.html. It typically takes 10 working days from the time you apply to receive a new 5-year or 10-year passport. There is a high level of demand for appointment slots in the days and weeks before a holiday and during the summer school

holiday.

- **Avoid a long wait.** Avoid scheduling your appointment on Mondays or the days immediately before or after a holiday when wait times are longest.

- **Check the website.** You can find answers to common questions, as well as useful forms and instructions, **on the Consulate's website at** <http://shanghai.usembassy-china.org.cn/service.html> or <http://shanghai.usconsulate.gov/service.html>.

Social Security Administration Q & A

The American Citizen Services (ACS) Unit has compiled a list of commonly asked questions raised to the Chief of the Asia Pacific Rim of the Social Security Administration (SSA) International Operations in Manila during his recent visit to Shanghai. More Q & A can be found at <http://ssa-custhelp.ssa.gov/>. If you are coming to ACS to submit a Social Security application or to obtain notarial services, please make an appointment beforehand online through <https://evisaforms.state.gov/acs/default.asp?postcode=SHG&appcode=1>.

Q: Where can I get Social Security assistance when I reside in China?

A: You may contact the Asia Pacific Rim of the SSA International Operations in Manila for assistance. The SSA office in Manila is configured to be like a U.S. stateside district office, providing many of the same services and functions. Its primary function is to administer SSA programs and services for people residing in the East-Asia Pacific Region. Ways to contact the SSA office in Manila are listed below.

Mailing Address:

SSAD-VARO

American Embassy

1131 Roxas Boulevard, Ermita, 0930 Manila, Philippines

Phone: (632) 301-2000 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM, Monday through Friday

Fax: (632) 522-1514

Email: FBU.Manila@ssa.gov

Website:

<http://manila.usembassy.gov/www3032.html>

Q: Can I apply for a Social Security Number (SSN) at the U.S. Consulate in Shanghai?

A: Yes. You may apply for a SSN at the American Citizen Services (ACS) Unit of the U.S. Consulate General in Shanghai. ACS will then forward your application to the SSA office in Manila for further processing. Due to varying diplomatic pouch mail pickup times and delays, it typically takes 3-6 months for people to receive a Social Security card in China. Please consult with the SSA office in Manila or ACS on what to bring before you come to ACS to submit your application.

Q: Is there any way for me to know the SSN sooner?

A: Yes. Since the Social Security card will be mailed directly from the SSA office in Baltimore to the mailing address that you left on your SSN application, we recommend that you leave a U.S. mailing address on your SSN application. This will help you to avoid an extra 2-4 weeks for international mails.

Q: I need the SSN to file tax. Can I request to know the number first before I receive the actual card in mail?

A: Yes. You may ask the ACS staff to add a note on your SSN application to request the SSA office in Manila to release your number once it's issued. Since the SSN can only be released when you appear in person, the SSA office in Manila will normally release the issued SSN to the ACS unit of the Consulate, and notify you to come to ACS to pick up your number in person. You may be able to know the SSN through this method in 2-3 months after you submit your complete SSN application to ACS.

Q: Can I apply for a SSN for my dependent to be used to file my U.S. tax?

A: Your dependent is eligible for a SSN if s/he is a U.S. citizen or has been admitted by the United States for permanent residence or U.S. employment. If your dependent is not eligible to have an SSN, you may apply for an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN) instead. To apply for an ITIN, please 1) complete IRS form W-7, available at www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw7.pdf, 2) obtain a certified copy of your de-

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Leaving Shanghai Consular District?

If you are departing the Shanghai consular district after a long stay here and you formally registered your stay with the U.S. Consulate, please do not forget to cancel your registration when you leave.

You can unregister yourself by visiting the <https://travelregistration.state.gov> site if you previously registered through this site.

If you previously submitted a paper registration form to the U.S. consulate, you may unregister yourself by sending an email request to:

ShanghaiACS@state.gov.

Criminal Record Checks and Fingerprinting

U.S. citizens may be asked to present a "certificate of good conduct" or "lack of a criminal record" for a variety of reasons for use abroad including permanent residence permission (visa), school attendance, employment, etc. U.S. law enforcement authorities may not be familiar with such a procedure since it is not commonly requested in the United States. There are a variety of options available to U.S. citizens seeking to obtain proof of their lack of a criminal record.

LOCAL POLICE CHECK: Go to your local police department where you reside or last resided in the United States, request that the police conduct a criminal records search and provide you with a document reflecting that there is no history of a criminal record. Local police departments may require your personal appearance in order to conduct the search. Your local police department can phrase this in whatever way they deem appropriate. The document should then be authenticated for use abroad following our guidance on authentication or legalization of documents.

FBI RECORDS CHECK: The [Criminal Justice Information Services \(CJIS\) Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation \(FBI\)](#) centralizes criminal justice information and provides accurate and timely information and services to local, state, federal, and international law enforcement agencies, the private sector, academia, and other government agencies. The subject of an identification record may obtain a copy thereof by submitting a [written request to the CJIS](#). The request must be accompanied by satisfactory proof of identity (consisting of name, date and place of birth, and a set of roll-inked fingerprint impressions) and a certified check or money order for the \$18 processing fee. The FBI will not provide copies of arrest records to individuals other than the subject of the record. Requests should be directed to FBI CJIS Division, Attn: SCU, Mod. D-2, 1000 Custer Hollow Rd., Clarksburg, West Virginia 26306. If there is no criminal record, a report reflecting this fact is provided.

AUTHENTICATION OF POLICE OR FBI CERTIFICATES OF LACK OF A CRIMINAL RECORD: The

FBI's CJIS Division will authenticate U.S. Department of Justice Order 556-73 fingerprint search results for international requests by placing the FBI seal and signature of a Division official on the results, if requested at the time of submission. Documents prepared in this matter may then be sent to the [U.S. Department of State Authentications Office](#) by the requestor to be authenticated if necessary. Please be sure to indicate the country in which the document is to be used. The FBI procedure became effective 1/25/2010 and will apply only to documents finalized after that date. Requests to authenticate previously processed results will not be accepted. See the [FBI FAQ on this subject](#).

Documents obtained from your local police will require additional authentication after you obtain the local **police seal**. **Contact your state Secretary of State's office** or other official designated in your state to authenticate state issued documents. See our [general guidance on authentication of documents for use abroad](#).

GETTING YOUR FINGERPRINTS TAKEN: U.S. citizens should be able to obtain fingerprint cards from their local police departments. U.S. embassies and consulates DO NOT generally provide this service. However, you may wish to enquire with a private fingerprinting agencies as below:

- **In Beijing:** "Beijing Tongda Shoucheng Institute of Judicial Expertise Science" (北京通达首诚司法鉴定所). Tel: 010-6290-7011.
- **In Shanghai:** "Forensic Science and Technology Institute" (司法鉴定科学技术研究所司法鉴定中心). Tel: 5235-2957.

This information is provided for reference only and should not be construed as an endorsement or recommendation.

Shanghai Consulate News for Americans

U.S. Consulate General,
Shanghai, China

1038 West Nanjing Road, 8/F
Westgate Mall 梅龙镇广场

(Méi lóng zhèn guǎngchǎng)

Tel: (86-21) 3217-4650

Fax: (86-21) 6217-2071

After Hours Emergencies:

(86-21) 6433-3936

Open 8:00am - 11:30am

and 1:30pm - 3:30pm

Monday to Friday *Closed on
Tuesday afternoons, weekends,
and holidays.

<http://shanghai.usconsulate.gov>

Someone Asked the Consul:

Can I request for a thicker passport?

Yes. If you choose to renew your passport, you have the option of receiving a 52-page passport book for the same price (\$110 for adults, and \$105 for children) as the normally issued 28-page passport book. When applying to renew your passport, please indicate that you would like to be issued a 52-page passport book. Instructions on renewing a U.S. passport are available at http://shanghai.usembassy-china.org.cn/u.s.passport_renewals.html.

Also, if your passport's visa pages are becoming full, but your passport is still valid and in good condition, you may apply to add a set of 24 additional pages to your current valid passport at a cost of \$82 per set of pages, up to two times maximum.

Social Security Administration Q & A

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pendent's passport from ACS as a notarial service, 3) check the instructions with form W-7 for additional filing requirements, such as the need to include original, completed tax returns, available at www.irs.gov/instructions/iw7/index.html, and 4) mail the completed form, certified copy of your dependent's passport and other documents to: IRS, ITIN Operation, PO Box 149342, Austin, Texas 78714-9342.

Q: How can I receive my Social Security benefits when I reside in China?

A: Unfortunately the international direct deposit from the U.S. Treasury Department to China is not available yet. There are several other ways for you to receive your Social Security

benefits payment if you reside in China. Option 1: provide a U.S. bank account to the Social Security Administration and have your payment sent to this account. Option 2: provide a bank account of a nearby area if you can, areas near China where direct deposit is available include Hong Kong, Japan. Option 3: provide your address in China and have your payment sent by check to the ACS unit of the U.S. Consulate General, ACS will then forward the check to you in a registered mail through the local postal system. Beneficiaries residing in the Shanghai consular district usually get their Social Security checks 4-6 weeks later after the checks are issued in the U.S.

Q: How can I contribute to the Social Security when I reside in China? I need 40 credits for retirement benefits, but I only have

32. Can I just pay in to buy the other 8 credits?

A: Unfortunately you cannot buy credits. The only way you can get credits is by earning wages in a job that is covered by Social Security or by having net income from self-employment. If you work for a federal, state or local government agency that is not covered by Social Security, you don't pay Social Security tax and you don't earn credits for monthly benefits based on those earnings. If you pay Medicare tax on those earnings, you do earn credits toward qualifying for Medicare at age 65.

